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ABSTRACT

The use of nontraditional adolescent literature in the secondary classroom and teacher training for this usage are discussed in this paper. After outlining a humanistic approach to adolescent literature, in which students are taught to use literature to illuminate their lives, the paper contrasts such an approach to the teaching of traditional literature, in which the emphasis is on understanding the text. It tells how certain societal changes have promoted the acceptance of adolescent literature as a serious genre and discusses the classroom focus on sociological, psychological, ethical, and ideological aspects of literary works. It next outlines the need for college methods courses in adolescent literature and presents guidelines for the selection of adolescent literature that are given to students in one methods course. The value of small group instruction in teaching adolescent literature is discussed, and suggestions are offered for the division of students into groups for class organization and for possible group activities. Finally, teacher-developed learning activity packets are described, the values of using them are listed, and suggestions are provided for incorporating questions and activities based on a hierarchy of thinking skills ranging from the factual to the conceptual and evaluative. (GT)

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THE WRITING AND TEACHING OF ADOLESCENT LITERATURE

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Schwartz- Summary

The following paper discusses teacher preparation for the newly important field of young adult literature (also referred to as adolescent literature)

First the teacher must define adolescent literature and develop a yardstick for its selection. Then the appropriate methodology must be developed. The methodology advocated here is termed humanistic and it focuses on the use of this literature to make the world and self knowable to the young adult. The necessity for this methodology derives from the paperback revolution and the replacement of reading with television.

Methodology in adolescent literature is based primarily on small groups within the larger classroom since it is in small groups that the maximum number of students will receive the opportunity to discuss the significance of adolescent literature to world and self. Teacher prepared materials for these small groups are referred to here as LAPs, Learning Activity Packets. One is given to each student for each literary work studied and in this LAP are incorporated all of the activities, tests, and teaching for the duration of the work. LAPS include large group, small group, and individual work and also incorporate a variety of questions and activities based on a hierarchy of thinking skills raning from the factual, at the bottom of the hierarchy to the conceptual and evaluative at the opp. The use of these LAPS serves to develop thinking skills, to develop autonomy, and to give students a total approach to their studies rather than the fragmented day by day study that now exists in large measure in our schools.

This paper is concerned with the use of non-traditional adolescent literature in the secondary school classroom and with teacher training for this usage.

What is Adolescent Literature?

Inclusively, adolescent literature is any literature read by adolescents. During the 1960's in the United States, and, increasingly in the United Kingdom, a large number of books began to be published that were written specifically for adolescents. These books rival adult books in their willingness to deal openly with all aspects of contemporary life, aspects which have traditionally been taboo in the classroom and include such matters as early sexuality, homosexuality, child abuse, addiction, mental disorder, disease and death, and others. Such books are increasingly read by secondary school students both in and out of the classroom, and, in some cases, the same books are read by adults.

The Humanistic Approach

The methodology that I employ is that students in my methods courses are trained to teach adolescent literature not as an end in itself but rather in terms of how it illuminates life. The procedure for young readers is to move outward, from literature to life. This technique is described as divergent and it employs questions which ask such things as : compare, contrast, imagine, project, complete, express your own opinion, explain similarities to this matter in your own life or in life about you, and discuss the matter which is the focus of this book in relation to

the approach in other works you have read."

This is a different method from that employed in the teaching of traditional literature (the classics), in which the movement was inward, from the student's life to the text. This approach is termed convergent and its end goal is not, as with the divergent approach, the understanding of life, but is rather the understanding of the work of literature under consideration. In this more traditional approach, the student is there for the literature, rather than the literature existing to serve the student's needs.

The purpose of traditional methodology was to take the student deeper and deeper into the text. This resulted in detailed examinations which often dealth with minutiae and with boring line-by-line analyses of great works which so bored and alienated students that they became unable to comprehend either the greatness of the works or their significance to them.

With traditional literature, the emphasis was on the text and on the test. For adolescent literature, the emphasis is on student response and the illumination of life.

For the traditional literature curriculum a certain body of work was selected and required, regardless of student interest. With adolescent literature (and this could not have occurred without the paperback revolution) there is a multi-text approach and students are given freedom to select and read those books which interest them, amuse them, or hold out promise to them of increased comprehension of the difficult adolescent stage of life.

Many of the traditional literaty works taught in the secondary school dealt with the past. Most adolescent literature works deal with the present and cover such subjects as ethnicity and moral consciousness.Much adolescent literature explains the cultural experiences of non-Anglo groups in a pluralistic society. In England this might be the West Indian experience in a London slum and in the United States adolescent literature covers the black experience, the American Indáan experience,the Chicano experience, the Jewish experience, the migrant worker experience, and others.*

Traditional literature, by and large, was concerned with the historial-cultural experience. Adolescent literature is concerned with the contemporary-cultural experience.

The ~~major~~ teaching techniques employed for traditional literature were the lecture, note-taking, individual reading ~~as an individual~~ and test taking. All of these methods, ~~of course,~~ are also valid and may be employed with adolescent literature, but the emphasis with this genre should be on dialogue, classroom discussion, discussion in small groups. The classroom is viewed, not as the place in which to listen to a lecture which may merely replicate what already exists in critical works, but instead, as an arena for dialogue about the issues raised in the work, a place to share, argue, and above all, to clarify perceptions about life.

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*Because of this emphasis on contemporeinity certain works, which focus on current events rather than the human condition in the midst of such events, become quickly dated. These books are of dubious value when their context is no longer significant in the teenager's immediate world. To discard such works does not imply an overwhelming expense since they are probably in paperbakc and, in addition, the multi-text approach indicates that not too many copies of any one work will be published.

Social Change and Adolescent Literature

Certain societal changes have helped in the acceptance of adolescent literature as a serious genre. The first, as mentioned above, has been the paperback revolution which made it possible to develop curricula from the multi-text vantage point and to require less of a financial investment than was previously the case with hardcover works.

In addition, the nature of literature is being questioned today more seriously than ever before as a result of the shift in student allegiance from books to television. Literature is affected by shifts both within the literary world and within society. The broad effect of this upheaval in literature means that the student comes to class less to receive teacher lecture on the truth as he perceives it and more to learn how to comprehend life through literature and how to use the truths in his own life.

Because of this relationship between current society and adolescent literature, the focus of class discussion usually includes one or more of the following categories: 1) The sociological; how are the characters in this work affected by socioeconomic factors? This will be stressed more in relation to one work than in relation to another. It is a particularly relevant category in terms of minority groups and in terms of economic level. 2) The psychological. What is notable in the psychological makeup of individual or family, which animates the story line. This is a particularly relevant category for work dealing with mental and emotional deviance, works such as <u>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</u>

by Ken Kesey or The Bell Jar, by Sylvia Plath.3) The Ethical. This includes the idea of poetic justice and also moves into the values realms of author and of characters within the work. What are the values of Heckleberry Finn? Was it ethical of him to help Jim, the runaway slave to escape. What of the ethics of Aunt Polly, who, when Huck says, "no'm killed a nigger", replies," That's good, because sometimes people do get hurt." This ethical category often overlaps with the next category, the ideological. 4) The Ideological refers to beliefs and ideas, both of the author and of the characters in the novel. For example, in the above work, what is Twain's philosophy about slavery, about violence, about the nature of the American frontier.

The core of adolescent literature is therefore, its relation to the student's immediate human concerns and affects the student's sense of human personality and comprehension of human society. The teaching and study of adolescent literature is thus viewed as both interdisciplinary and humanistic and such study includes subjects usually thought of as the province of the sociologist, the psychologist, the philosopher or the historian.

The priarily contemporary setting of adolescent literature, its focus on adolescent problems and behavior, its clarity of language and allusion, its lack of ambiguity in relations to questions of right and wrong, its emphasis on straightforward plot and character presentation, its highlighting of ethical dilemmas, and

its relation to social and political events of the contemporary world mean that the student reading a young adult novel is learning more about self and the world than about what is in the novel. The work provides a jumping-off place of his examination of self and the world. This approach focuses on student work as posessing more significance for the young reader than has the work itself.

Aspects of Teacher Training for Adolescent Literature-----

It is possible for a secondary English teacher to have had little or no experience with adolescent literature. The classics that are read by English majors in college are rarely the works that the new teacher will be using, and the college methods used to teach them are rarely useful in the secondary school.

I have had future English teachers come into my undergraduate methods classes, and practicing, experienced teachers come into graduate methods classes, who have read no works about the American Indian, Blacks, Jews, Orientals, life in regions of the United States different from their own, etc. Some students, for example, when first exposed to Return to Manzanar by Jean Houston, a book about the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, had never heard of this shameful event in our national history.

Another illustration might be the recently acclaimed television series ROOTS. Over and over again, members for the publ, on being interviewed, stated that they had never before known how the black

got here from Africa and how mistreated he was afterward. Many said they now felt new sympathy for American blacks, after having been exposed to their history. This is exactly the kind of information that would have been made accessible to them through Adolescent Literature. Many teachers who come into my methods classes know far more about life and literature in eighteenth-century England than they do about ethnic and socioeconomic groups in their own country, in the past and in the present.

In addition, many of these teachers have never themselves been in situations in which they could freely, without inhibition of fear, confront, discuss, and begin to understand their own feelings about such aspects of contemporary life as homosexuality, alcoholism, drug addicition, the pression of institutions, and child abuse. Many adults go through their lives without ever having the opportunity to discuss such matters in constructive, controlled circumstances. The college classroom gives them this opportunity, which they may later extend to their own secondary school students.

A college methods course in adolescent literature is essential to acquaint teachers with a variety of books in this genre, to explore methods and materials for teaching these works, and to give teachers the opportunity to examine their own feelings about the controversial episodes and ideas contained in these works.

Which Adolescent Literature ?

Good adolescent literature attempts to tell the truth. Bad adolescent literature prestends to tell the truth but confuses

sentimentality with sentiment, panders to the cheap triumph, and sacrifices the universal for the topical. It attempts to feed on the youth culture, to espouse values it thinks young people will respond to, and to pretend closeness, interest, and sincerity, only in order to sell.

Poor adolescent literature is remarkably like advertising. It sells spurious products to the reader (viewer) by appealing to the basest emotions (fear, greed, the desire for conformity) rather than by making the reader think. This kind of literature uses current slang, current values, current trends, and, fortunately, is generally as transitory as the most popular songs. Teachers must be particularly wary of this kind of book because it is often flashy and appealing--as interesting, involving, and tempting as a cheap or violent television show. The medium is often so impressive that the reader is overwhelmed by it and does not have time to think about the lack of message.

Teachers in training are given the following guidelines for selection of adolescent literature when they are students in my methods classes.

1. Good adolescent literature meets adequate literary standards.
2. Good adolescent literature helps young people become more in touch with themselves by establishing a common bond with the rest of humanity.
3. Good adolescent literature shows young people that others share their problems.

4. Good adolescent literature helps to make the world knowable by telling the truth.

5. Without being didactic, good adolescent literature affirms and reaffirms those values that keep people hoping, that give young people the strength to continue to grow.

6. Good adolescent literature helps to combat the values and events that result in apathy, disillusionment, and retreat.

7. Good adolescent literature has a humanistic base of respect for human beings.

8. Good adolescent literature deals with eternal problems rather than with the transitory, commercialized, manufactured mores of the youth culture.

9. Good adolescent literature reflects the affirmative, hopeful visition of the twenty-first century, embodied in the Humanist Manifesto, which says, in part:

> Humanity, to survive, requires bold and daring measures. We need to extend the uses of scientific method, not renounce them, to fuse reason with compassion in order to build constructive social and moral values. The ultimate goalsshould be the fulfillment of the potential for growth in each human personality--not for the favored few, but for all of humankind. Only a shared world and global measures will suffice.
>
> A humanist outlook will tap the creativity of each human being and provide the vision and courage for us to work together. This outlook emphasizes the role human beings can play in their own spheres of action....Humanism can provide the purpose and inspiration that so many seek; it can give personal meaning and significance to human life.... Humanism is an ethical process through which we all

> can move, above and beyond the divisie particulars, heroic personalities, dogmatic creeds, and ritual customs of past religions or their mere negation...for us, it is a vision of hope, a direction for satisfying survival.(1)

Method in Adolescent Literature

The classroom in which adolescent literature is taught should be viewed primarily as an arena for the exchange of ideas. Therefore, the major teaching technique will be the use of small groups whinin the classroom. The purposes for the division into small groups are the following:

a. Students who are inhibited in front of a larger group will more readily participate.

b. More students can be simultaneously involved.

c. Peer teaching is inescapable.

d. Discipline problems are diminished, since talking, the present primary cardinal sin, is expected and is a necessity, rather than a crime.

e. The class atmosphere relaxes, thus freeing students to focus on content, rather than on form.

f. The teacher is freed to move arounddthhe classroom and is thus able to have individual contact with many more students per period.

g. Dialogue and the exchange of ideas, essential for the teaching of adolescent literature, are increased.

Ways of arranging these small groups vary. Some variations follow:

a. Random grouping. " All right, divide into groups of four with the students sitting around you."

1. Humanist Manifestos I and II. Prometheus Books, 923 Kensington Avenue, Buffalo, New York, 14215, 1973.

b. Purposeful grouping, devised before the class period. In this case, names of group members can either be dittoed or posted before the class begins in order to minimize confusion.

There are various kinds of purposeful grouping. They are as follows:

a. One leader per group to make sure the grouo functions.

b. No leaders per group (all leaders put together in one group, to ensure additional participation)

c. Socialization group to help young people make friends.

d. Grouping for peer teaching.

e. Grouping for special skills and abilities.

f. Remedial grouping.

Activities to be performed by groups also vary. Some variations follow:

a. All groups doing the same work (based on LAPS, Learning Activity Packets)

b. Each group working on a different book.

c. One or more small groups going to the library,

d. One group preparing a creative dramatics assignment.

e. One or more research groups going to the library, interviewing someone, go ing on a field trip.

f. One group preparing a debate.

g. One group working on ana related art experience (mural, music, crafts, etc.)

The duration of groups also varies. Possibilities are:

a. Groups for one day.

b. Groups for longer periods of time, depending on the task.

c. Groups to remain constant throughout the reading of a book.

The organization of groups within one class period also varies in the following ways:

a. Groups work throughout the period.

b. Groups work for part of the period, then assemble as an entire class.

c. Groups work for an entire period, then go into individual follow-up tasks for homework.

d. Groups work on special problems while the remainder of the class works individually or as a whole/

The heart of the teaching of adolescent literature if the Learning Activity Packet (LAP), which is prepared in advance by the teacher. The LAP and its objectives are addressed to the students so that an objective would be phrased," You will understand how Mark Twain uses the symbolism of sea and shore in Huckleberry Finn", rather than as was usually the case in the past, that the objectives were addressed by the teacher to the teacher so that an objective would read:" Teach symbolism in Huckleberry Finn." The values of the LAP are the following:

a. The students see the entire course of study for a particular work (novel, individual story or poem, or group of stories and poems, etc.) laid out before them instead of, as was usually the case with traditional teaching, going from day to day, in fragmented fashion, with the teacher the only one who understands the total plan.

b. The students have the responsibility for fulfilling the total plan which is given to them with completeness and clarity.

c. There is ample opportunity for students to clarify confusion with teacher and peers.

d. The LAP is like a roadmap. It provides for individual, group, and class work. All materials can be used for any one of these three arrangements.

e. The LAP encourages a student-centered approach to curriculum building.

f. Using a LAP frees the teacher during class time to circulate, work with small groups or individuals, handle any problems that might arise. Instead of performing in front of the class as chief actor, the teacher is freed to act as guide, consultant, and facilitator.

g. Once a LAP has been prepared, it provides for maximum flexibility in grouping, because the same LAP can be used by individuals, small groups, and the entire class.

h. The students know exactly what to do even if the teacher is absent and a substitute presides.

i. The LAPS provide an excellent, concrete body of work on which to base student evaluation. Record keeping is simplified.

j/ Once the teacher has done the initial work of preparing a LAP, he or she can amend it each time the literary work on which it is based is used.

Both the

Questions for Inclusion in LAP

Questions from each of the following four categories should be included in the LAP. The proportion of each type of question is determined by the nature of the specific work. One work may require more attention to new vocabulary works, one less, one work may have less relation to life, one more (thus necessitating more or less divergent questions), etc. But the good LAP indicates awareness of these different categories and awareness of their position on the cognitive scale. A teacher aware of thesehierarchy could not rest exclusively on abstract vocabulary work.

The hierarchy of thinking skills on which questions and activities should be based is the following:

1. Factual. Under this heading come yes-no questions, factual questions, multiple choice, fill-ins, definitions, etc. This category contains questions essentially lacking in ambiguity.

2. Convergent. These are questions that draw together a number of facts and require analysis of those facts. Convergent questions stay within the confines of the particular work under study. They are the literary analysis questions dealing with matters such as plot, character, and setting. They require the reader to read between the lines, to draw conclusions, to interpret.

3. Divergent. These are questions that go outside the individual work. They require knowledge and understanding of more than one work. Comparison and contrast questions fit into this category. "Compare the treatment of the mentally ill in One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest and I Never Promised You a Rose Garden."Divergent questions also relate the literary work to society and to the life of the reader. A student reading Karl Shapiro's "Auto Wreck" may be asked to use that as a springboard for writing about an automobile accident he has witnessed or experienced.

4. Conceptual.This is the highest category of these four and here students are asked to arrive at categories, at generalization at concept development, at evaluation techniques. " After reading Typee, Benito Cereno, and Bartleby the Scrivener, describe and evaluate Melville's world view."

This paper has attempted to describe the newly emerging field of young adult literature in terms of teacher preparation for its teaching in the secondary school classroom.